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SEEING CRAVING FOR EXACTLY WHAT IT IS

Recently I wrote this to a list on the internet and after sharing it with our teacher, Bhante Vimalaramsi, he recommended that I share it here. The subject is Craving. If this is the root of our suffering, as the Buddha told us repeatedly, then it is very important we understand exactly what Craving is. We need to know what it is if we are going to nip it in the bud eh? KK

April 26, 2004:

Hi Everyone!

I'm back from a few retreats and travelling with our meditation teacher, Bhante Vimalaramsi, and others preparing the center for the upcoming summer sessions. Exciting developments are coming our way with a new piece of land and encouragement from surrounding neighbors to start a supporting industry for our community idea. Though I did not have the time to respond to many things that were discussed, I have been watching the entries and I must say some have been very interesting.

This one most recent entry on *CRAVING* ("Seeing, Seeing, and seeing" which was the string topic that peaked my curiosity) caught my eye today and got me going a little.

One member of the list who attended and contributed, seemed closest to getting to the heart of the matter here with her entry of:

>>May all see the craving for self-identity view as it actually is present: inconstant, compounded, dependently co-arisen, subject to ending, subject to passing away, subject to fading, subject to cessation.>>

The part about "subject to cessation:" is the most important to note here. That we should actually know that it IS possible to end craving through observing it's passing away is important. If it is actually possible to cut off craving in the bud, then there IS a chance for a cessation of Dukkha because the process goes no further beyond this craving.

But it is very important to understand WHAT CRAVING IS to begin with in a way one can relate to it within our daily meditation practice.

First look at how craving occurs?

Because a feeling arises, Craving arises. This is what we know from many of the suttas that show us where the craving occurs in the process we are studying. But what is craving? As a feeling arises, it is either pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. The "CRAVING" which comes next in the process, (occurring very quickly too) is manifested by the "I like it" or "I don't like it" mind of ours. OK. Next comes the CLINGING, which is the

story our minds run away with about why we like it or don't like it (whatever "it" is that arose!).

Having now defined what exactly the CRAVING is along the process, one can begin to watch within their meditation as a feeling arises, and the CRAVING quickly follows. Now you need to know HOW to end the craving? Ah! As one is doing the meditation, with an object of meditation (be it the breath or Loving Kindness, or whatever,) one begins to become aware of a slight tension in the body, which, if observed carefully, usually manifests first in the head area, occurring just as a feeling begins to arise, (it matters not what this feeling is about) one lets the feeling/thought go, also relaxing the entire bodily formation, most especially any slight tension in the head that most of us forget about as a part of our body. We are specifically directed to do this within the sutta instructions (see " tranquilize the bodily formation on the in-breath and on the out-breath" [see MN 118 : Bhikkhu Bodhi translation, for an example of this phrase which runs through many of the discourses repeatedly]

At this point one returns to their object of the meditation and continues to observe any further movements of the mind as they occur i.e. further feelings/thoughts that may arise as you continue meditating...

Now it isn't easy to "let it go" at first at the point of the CRAVING! No. In fact, at first, most of us let it go after falling into the "CLINGING" which is what occurs following the craving and very fluently, I might add, as it happens so fast that many people who talk about this today, have simply changed the term to "grasping" which is inclusive of the craving and clinging together. But if we do this, we are eliminating a step in the process, and losing the opportunity to understand that we CAN, in fact, eventually reach a point in our training where we can, let it go at the point of CRAVING! Now, if one trains to let the thoughts go earlier and earlier, one ACTUALLY CAN let them go before the CRAVING hits. One can learn, through practice, to feel the earliest tensions within the bodily formation during the deeper more subtle arising of the feeling.....as it comes up.

This is HOW one can go into the deepest states of observation which, in fact, match the meditation progression described in the Discourses. Our progress becomes easier for us to follow as one practices in this way because if one also listens to the Discourses being taught (specifically, directly from the suttas, word for word in entirety) as we progress, we are repeating the experiential form of learning of the ancients as it was originally done!

In this way one can begin to understand, for example, Sariputta's experience more clearly. We come to understand why, in MN 111, the Buddha uses this particular monk's experience to teach others meditation and encouraged other monks to use this example when guiding their students.

So, by understanding exactly WHAT IS CRAVING, which is the MANIFESTATION OF THE MIND AS " I like it" or "I don't like it" clearly, we have a chance to learn how to let go of the cause of suffering early on.

Remembering the direct teaching of the Buddha when teaching us the process we are observing (of Dependent Origination):

- Because contact arises, feeling arises.
- Because feeling arises, Craving arises.
- Because craving arises, Clinging arises.

So nipping CRAVING in the bud IS TRULY possible! Keep your meditation going.....

As one stays on the object of meditation longer and longer, without wavering, it allows us to see deeper and clearer the impersonal process of the movements of mind. We do not control HOW it moves. But we can improve our alertness to detect when it moves. We remain on the object of meditation. In the peripheral area of the mind, feelings and thoughts arise and we can observe this happening as we do the meditation, releasing them when they arise, relaxing the entire bodily formation and returning to the object of meditation to continue with our observation.

What you will see as you do the meditation in this way, releasing, relaxing, returning to the object again and then doing it again and again, is truly amazing.

Try it. I sincerely hope this has been of some help to you all....

Sending you much loving-kindness to you all! Remember to SMILE into it, no matter what it is! :-) It's always your choice.

Khanti-Khema Asst. to Bhante Vimalaramsi

Resource study used for this article came in part from MN 38 which is "*The Greater Discourse on the Destruction of Craving*" MN 38:17 and 38:41

Questions regarding this article should be written to sisterkhema@dhammasukha.org

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